

***A Practical Guide
to the Technical Aspects
of Redistricting***

by

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the Technical Aspects of Redistricting**

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Introduction

Asian Americans are slowly grasping political strength in America and with each political step upward, we gain more political clout and community representation to better our communities. This year the crucial step involves our active participation in the political redistricting process. Once every ten years our representative bodies redraw district lines for seven electoral seats or jurisdictions, i.e., Congressional, State Senate, State Assembly, County Board of Supervisors, Board of Education, Board of Equalization, and City Council districts. How they draw those lines can greatly affect the political futures of our Asian Pacific American communities. Historically, many of our communities have been gerrymandered in the process by dividing us into units so small that we are unable to make our collective voices heard.

Our numbers in certain communities are now reaching levels where we can provide the significant swing votes in electing public officials. Thus, the tables are slowly turning to where we must demand fair representation for the good of our communities. By creating districts where Asians are 25% or more of the total voter population, we can have a powerful political voice.

To this end, the Public Policy Project at the UCLA, Asian American Studies Center, has been providing technical assistance to local groups involved in redistricting. Although many of the battles over state level offices have already been fought, many local

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government seats have not yet been redistricted. The Public Policy Project has put together this manual so that local groups can use such information to carry out the technical aspect of participating in the redistricting process. This manual is crucial, because the inability to use technical data should not be a barrier to effective participation in the redistricting process.

Much of the following is based on our experience with redistricting for state offices, particularly the redistricting of state assembly districts. However, the procedures are applicable to redistricting at all levels, such as city council and school board seats.

Prior to starting your community redistricting dataset, read as much as possible about the redistricting issue, especially the literature pertaining to minorities. This step is necessary in order to gain a broad sense of the redistricting process. Publications of the Asian American Studies Center, Public Policy Projects, would be a good place to start. In addition, a knowledge or familiarity with the voter behavior patterns of Asian Pacific Americans would provide a broader context for a greater understanding of the issues surrounding redistricting.¹

A selection of what tools your group would like to use in the technical part of the redistricting process must be chosen. The choices range from the high tech computers, to the low tech method with a pen and paper. Because most community groups cannot afford an expensive computer system and the expensive PL 94-171 (computer data form of census data) this booklet will focus mainly upon the low tech method. Much of what will be covered however, could also apply to the high tech method. Shown below is a prioritized activities list in which all of the technical aspects of redistricting are discussed.

¹ Nakanishi, "The Next Swing Vote? Asian Pacific Americans and California Politics." in Racial and Ethnic Politics in California, eds. B.O. Jackson and M.B. Preston, IGS Press, Berkeley, California, 1991. pp. 25-55.

Before proceeding however, gather the tools listed here: acetate paper (clear plastic sheets) (8 1/2 X 11); white paper (8 1/2 X 11); several different color pens; a map of your area(s); census data for your area(s) of interest (see Step Three, numbers 1, 2, and 3); and other additional data (see Step Three).

Step One: Make Population Density Maps

Begin by defining the geographic area surrounding your community (see figure 1). The area should be sufficiently large so you can see several electoral districts that include your community or that are adjacent to your community.

Locate the census tract maps for each area you have selected (figure 2). Your group can get census tract numbers from your local library, from a university or college campus, or from your elected official. You may also contact the nearest Census Bureau. The Thomas Brothers Guide with census tract overlay is a good, easy-to-use resource material.

Create a paper spreadsheet with four separate columns; Census tract numbers, Total population, Asian Pacific American population, and percentage of Asian Pacific Americans. List your area's population data to match their census tract numbers in sequential order on the spreadsheet. Gather the population breakdowns by ethnic groups for 1980, and 1990, and map out the ethnic data. (Having two decades worth of data will allow your group to create a data set which will show a history of Asian Pacific American voter dilution / fragmentation in your area.) Focusing on the population figures for Asian Pacific Americans for each census tract, create a legend on your acetate sheet (overlayed onto a map) for differing Asian Pacific American population percentages using different color schemes. Utilizing the legend, color in your census tracts. Create a separate map for each decade (see figure 3).

Step Two: Gathering Political Boundaries

On separate acetate sheets map out the old (1980's) political boundary lines for the political jurisdictions that are of interest to you or your group, e.g., Congressional, State Senate, State Assembly, County Board of Supervisors, Board of Education, and

City Council. The boundaries should be available from current elected officials. Make your maps specific to the decade in which they were drawn.

Overlay each individual boundary map onto your population density maps one at a time. You should now be able to visually detect any form of gerrymandering (figure 4). In figure 4 the communities of Filipinotown (small circle) and Koreatown (large circle) are shown. Note how the district shown extracts certain census tracts out of these two Asian communities, thereby fragmenting their voting blocs. Indeed, although not shown, Koreatown is currently split into four separate city council districts and Filipinotown is split into three.

Step Three: Designing a District

Utilizing the population map of 1990 that you created in step one, create district lines to maximize the Asian Pacific American vote within each district seat. Determine the target population size of your districts, which is equal to the total population (eg. in your city council district or school board district) divided by the total number of seats. (This information can be gotten from either an elected official in your area, or the local city hall.)

Locate the most populous Asian Pacific American areas in your density map (figure 5). Then begin drawing your proposed district lines, adding or subtracting census tracts until the total number in the district is roughly equal to the target population size (figure 6a, and 6b demonstrate how the Asian Pacific American percentage within a particular district may fluctuate as you add and subtract tracts to achieve your goal).

In figure 6a, an Asian Assembly district is created in the Greater Downtown, Los Angeles area in which Asian Pacific Americans would comprise 26% of such a possible district. Or, depending upon which census tracts you would enter into your district your configuration and Asian Pacific American percentage will vary (figure 6b). Be very selective when you pick and choose the tracts you wish to admit in your plans. Your objective is to maximize the concentration of Asian Pacific Americans. Also reread any literature on gerrymandering (redrawing a district in a detrimental

manner which dilutes minority votes. Doing so will prevent you from gerrymandering your own community. Such information will affect the number you can admit within respective districts and thus your group must coordinate and strategize line drawing accordingly. For example, if your community only has 20,000 Asians, you must add in other census tracts in order to get the population amount required by the legislature. In designing your districts be aware of the considerations listed below and consider them when drawing any sort of boundaries.

Additional Factors to Consider

The following is a list of additional factors you should consider. They can help you decide which tracts to include or exclude in your proposed district(s):

- 1/ percentage Democrats; percentage Republican (for partisanship examination)
- 2/ percentage Registered to vote by ethnic group and precinct (for analyzing which non-Asian and Asian census tracts may be important for your group)
- 3/ percentage Voted by ethnic group and precinct (to make sure that the people (tracts) you have selected will turn out to vote)
- 4/ History of how politicians have treated Asians in your area (to examine who might be possible future candidates to cultivate)
- 5/ Since candidates must live in the districts in which they run, find out where he/she resides.
- 6/ Check for possible effects on other minority or interest groups.
- 7/ Find out where and when public hearings on your political boundary(s) are being held so that you may voice your opinions.
- 8/ Examine the timeline in which your group has to work in and follow it carefully.
- 9/ Where possible, districts should preserve the integrity of cities, and should be compact and contiguous.
- 10/ Contact other Asian Pacific American groups as well as any other minority or public interest group so that you may work together to achieve similar goals.

11/ Try to gather redistricting proposals from other minority groups. Doing so may allow you to check on what they are doing and to also offer commentary on their methods of treating the Asian Pacific Community fairly or unfairly.

All of the above dimensions are difficult to consider simultaneously. However they need to be weighed in order to effectively gain political representation. Admittedly, some of the information are hard to obtain, but it is advisable to address as many of the issues as possible.

Step Four: Assembling Supporting Evidence

You should develop supporting evidence for your proposed plans. Start by determining if there is any past Gerrymandering (dilution of voting bloc)? Locate historical gerrymandering or non-gerrymandering within your respective communities. This can be accomplished by recovering the old district lines for the 1980 years for each district seat. Then placing such lines onto a current 1990 Asian Pacific American population densities map. You should be able to spot any sort of dilution or fragmentation of your group (see figure 4). Finally think of ways to prevent future gerrymandering of your Asian Pacific American community, like lobbying your assemblyman, senator, or congressman.

Secondly, identify any concerns or issues which are not being addressed by the current politicians and determine the reasons why. Contact community agencies for this information. Also question them on whether or not they feel their funding needs are adequately met by state and federal reapportioned funds based on census data. Check for any lack of political influence and representation for your respective community. This aspect is important because such data can be used as a tool to justify redistricting your area in a particular fashion.

Thirdly, examine current and past social indicators that flow from the gerrymandering process. Look into issues of discrimination, police brutality, Anti-Asian violence, poverty, unemployment, etc. Locate any prior discrimination against your community due to a lack of political redress. For example, lack of certain governmental services, lack of funding for English as a Second Language programs, etc. When added to step six, this aspect can be very

useful in mobilizing others toward your cause.

Step Five: Presenting and Defending Your Plans

Write up all of your observations and findings which occurred throughout your research. Put them into an organized and concise manner. Add in all preliminary information on redistricting. Synthesize and analyze your findings (ie. maps, interview, etc.) with the information acquired. The result will be a thorough overview of redistricting in great detail. Now you are ready to attend hearings to represent and protect your own community's interests in the line redrawing process.

When turning in your proposed districts seek the assistance of those in charge of redrawing your districts. From them you should receive the exact methodology in which you must organize your proposed district plans.

Should the political boundaries be drawn and a dilution of your community occurs, there are legal means of pushing for a more favorable alternate district, utilizing the Voting Rights Act. To see if such an option is available to your group contact an attorney that specializes in civil rights. In Southern California contact, the Asian Pacific American Legal Center's at (213)748-2022; and in Northern California, the Asian Law Caucus at (415)391-1655. In addition, refer to the "Voting Rights Act" piece written by the Asian American Studies Center, Public Policy Project group.

Conclusion

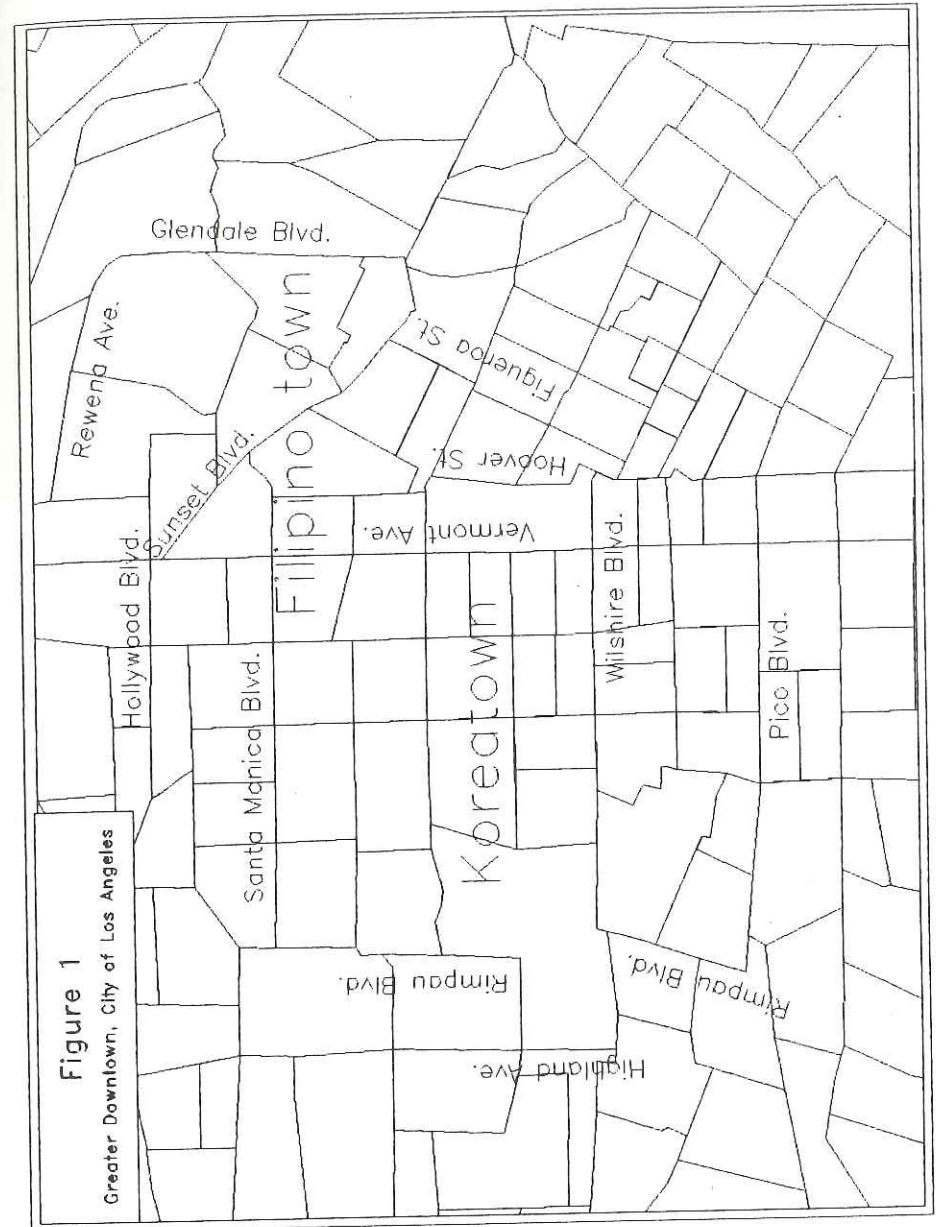
As implied, the technical aspects of redistricting are tedious and time consuming, requiring many hours. However, the rewards to such efforts are immeasurable for the community good. In order to fight for fair representation one must have the necessary tools and ammunition to participate in a politically effective manner. Creation of such a data set is indeed an imperative if your group is to even attempt to grasp the brass ring of ultimately gaining fair representation for your community.

BEST OF LUCK AND SUCCESS!!!

Suggested Readings²

- titles: Reapportionment and Redistricting in a Nutshell, 1991.
- Redistricting and Political Empowerment of Asian Pacific Americans in Los Angeles: A Position Paper, 1991.
- Asian Pacific American Awareness and Involvement in Redistricting, 1991.
- Breaking New Ground: Asian Pacific Americans and Redistricting in the SouthBay, 1991.
- Breaking New Ground: Asian Pacific Americans and Redistricting in the Greater Downtown Area, 1991.
- The Voting Rights of Asian Pacific Americans, 1991.

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²Available from the Public Policy Projects, Asian American Studies Center, UCLA.

